1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

never to have had any large-scale central political organization, and their history is full of occasions when one group of Yao has attacked another. Even within his own area the authority of the chief was not, apparently, sufficiently strong to prevent one village headman from raiding his neighbours; the chief maintained no standing army.[1] The chief held certain rights and privileges. He was entitled to the ground tusk of any elephant found in his territory (the finder was rewarded after it had been sold, with a cloth); he received tribute in food,[2] with which he entertained visitors. He took a share of the spoils of war and was also entitled to annual labour service and to a gift when he made a new burial place. Apart from his military and judicial responsibilities, he had authority to settle when and where initiation ceremonies should be held.[3] The right to hold these ceremonies was sought after by the village headmen as a mark of status.[4] The chiefs or headmen of certain families had the right to wear a white cloth bound round their temples as insignia of rank.[5]

In addition the chief had a certain ritual status. He was thought to incur mystical danger by contact with death, and so was not allowed to attend a funeral nor to eat a chicken brought by a messenger announcing a death, nor to accompany his military expeditions. He was supposed to have great power through special medicines. He had to make offerings to the ancestors, especially in affairs concerning the whole people, such as drought or epidemic. He was expected to give a burial cloth at the death of an important man. At his death a period of social disorganization was recognized, members of his village were allowed to pillage and rape, until he was buried.

Succession to the chiefly office was matrilineal. The chief's position was based partly on his status as the senior male of his own matrilineal kin group, partly on his wealth. His command over slaves, guns, and caravans to the coast was greater than that of others, and from these his military strength was derived, for a chief was powerless without his following of dependents. The chief of the area was also headman of his own village. In fact, the position and duties of a village headman (except that he could not exact tribute)[6] reproduced in small scale those of the chief. The headmen also were in mystical danger through contact with death and were the channel through which the ancestors were approached in affairs concerning the village. They, too, built up their prestige and wealth by slaving activities. They seem to have been largely independent of the chief, carrying on slave raids of their own, and if they could gain a sufficient following, they might break away from the chief, and set up their own chiefdoms.[7]

The chief ruled through a hierarchy of headmen. His councillors were superior headmen, placed over a number of village headmen. Commoners could approach the chief only through the councillor in whose area their village belonged. The councillor's special duties were to report daily to the chief on the affairs of his district, to advise, and to arbitrate in the chief's own domestic affairs, e.g. in conflicts between the chief and his brothers and nephews. The councillors were not necessarily relatives of the chief,[8] but were chosen on account of their general status in the community, and their

[1] Elmslie, 4, 1899, p. 105, says of the Yao in the Shire highlands: 'Every tenth man one met might be set down as a chief . . . petty quarrels of petty chiefs were abundant. . . .' See Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 169 and 154.
[2] Stannus, 4, 1922, says that only beer was owed to him.
[3] Ibid., p. 279.
[4] Duff, 1903, p. 312.
[5] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 16; Werner, 1906, p. 260.
[6] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 153.
[7] Ibid., pp. 32 and 156.
[8] Ibid., p. 156.

1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

performed these services used to enter a special relationship of privileged familiarity with the village of the dead. This has died out in Nyasaland, but accounts of *Utani*[1] among the Yao at Masasi and Songea suggest that something of the kind is still practised.

Chiefs and headmen are not buried outside the village, as are other persons. They used to be buried before their own huts, but now in the centre of the village. Shrines were raised over their graves, at which offerings of beer and flour were made. If the village was moved the pot of beer sunk into the ground at the chief's grave was also removed and reinstated at the new site. A dead slave was buried by his fellow slaves; normal rights of sepulture were denied to suicides and to persons who had died in taking the poison ordeal (that is, convicted sorcerers).[2]

OTHER DISTINCTIVE CULTURAL FEATURES

The Yao have a tribal mark of two short cuts on each side of the face between the eye and the ear.[3] Their women did not wear the *pelele*, lip-ring, although their neighbours the Makua and Makonde did;[4] the fashion seems to have spread to south Nyasa in the 1880's, as many travellers commented on it, without distinguishing whether the wearers were Yao, Nyanja, or Lomwe.[5] The women used to pierce the left *ala nasi* and insert a metal or lead stud, *cipini*.[6]

MAKUA-LOMWE

TRIBAL AND SUB-TRIBAL GROUPINGS AND DEMOGRAPHY

NOMENCLATURE

The *Ma-* in *Makua* is not a prefix, but part of the name, Variant spellings are *Makwa*, *Makoa*, *Makoane*. They are sometimes referred to by the name of one subdivision, the Medo Makua, and called *Ameto* or *Meto*.[7]

The *Lomwe* (also spelt *Lomues*) are called *Alolo* by the Yao, and are also frequently called *Anguru* (*Nguru*) which is an old name for the people of the region.[8] Any of the Makua-Lomwe peoples who have migrated into south Nyasaland are collectively termed *Nguru* in official reports; Nguru is a hill in the region of Portuguese East Africa, whence they come, but they should not be confused with the Nguru of Tanganyika.[9] Another name for them is *Acilowe*.[10] *Alolo* is incorrectly applied to all the Lomwe; it has a stricter application to the Cuabo from Quilimano.

[1] Scrivenor, 1937; Moreau, 1941; Spies, 1943.

[2] Main sources for burial are: Johnson, 5, 1922, pp. 28–30; Stannus, 4, 1922, pp. 240–6; Abdullah, 1919, pp. 19–21; Duff, 1903, pp. 322–4; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 210–12.

[3] Murray, 1932, p. 153.

[4] Thompson, 1882, pp. 77–8, writing of the Yao of the Ruvuma valley.

[5] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 16–17; 'around Blantyre hardly any woman is without it'.

[6] Stannus, 1, 1910, p. 316.

[7] *Handbook of Portuguese Nyasaland*, 1921, p. 39; Murray, 1922, p. 56; Weule, 1, 1909, p. 259; Livingstone, 1874, p. 32.

[8] Theal, 1899, pp. 415–17; Gaspar Bocarro passed through Manguro country. Burton, 1873 (Lacerda's Journey, 1798), mentions Mangueros.

[9] Abraham, 1931, p. 15; Murray, 1922, p. 46.

[10] Johnson, W. P., 4, 1894.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

of the ancestors of the chief are supposed to affect the welfare of the initiands. Though some village headmen may conduct initiation ceremonies they are unable to offer rain-prayers. These are offered by a chief on two occasions. The first is in November, before the rains have started. The chief's wife and some women from the bigger villages in the near vicinity of the chief's village gather at his hut. They brew beer—*ukana wacisoka*, the beer of the spirits—to be used as a libation. At sunset on the appointed day the chief goes to the shrine tree where some headmen have gathered, and pours some of the beer into a pot, partly buried at the root of the tree, while he invokes all the spirits of his departed ancestors—mainly matrilineal but occasionally some patrilateral. He then entreats the spirits to send some rain and to look after their 'children' in the land. Sometimes a length of calico is hung on the tree as an extra offering. Should no rain fall the chief will have to repeat the offering until it does fall. When the rains have ended in March he makes a second offering 'of thanks'.

In the context of the present discussion, the important point is that it is only the chief who can make this libation and offer this prayer. If his plea fails the whole area starves, and no headman may supplicate his ancestors on his own behalf or approach the chief's ancestors through his own ancestors. The grain for the beer comes from the various villages, but not on a fixed rate of levy. Some villages never contribute. The chief buys the offered cloth on behalf of his people. When in 1948 the cloth on the shrine tree was stolen, Chiwalo imposed a levy on the village headmen in the area so that a new cloth could be bought. Here the boundaries of the chiefdoms are important, and no headman outside Chiwalo's area was approached. A village headman from Jalasi's area, though geographically much closer to Chiwalo, relies on Jalasi's rain-offerings and may not approach Chiwalo or plead with him to offer a rain-prayer to his ancestors.

Another ritual situation in which the limits of the chiefdom appear is during the institutionalized pillage on the death of a chief. I have not been in any area when the chief has died, so that I rely here on the tales of informants. During the mourning rites certain feasts are held. The food for the mourning feast of a commoner or village headman is provided from his estate

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

766 by his relatives. For the feasts during the mourning at a chief's death the food is acquired by institutionalized pillage (*cipinimbe*).
661 The villagers in a chiefdom are often first informed of the death of a chief by the appearance of men from his village. These men are by custom allowed to take from a village any article of food they can find—flour, a goat, some chickens, prepared relish, or whatever is lying around in the village. The owners of the food may not charge them with theft. This food is used in the funeral feast. The excesses to which the chief's men may go became circumscribed after the White conquest. Previously, almost any crime short of murder could be committed under the guise of *cipinimbe*. More recently, owing to Government opposition, it has been restricted to the taking of smaller articles of food, such as flour and chickens. Some people are beginning to object even to this. The chief's funeral is a public affair and all his subjects may attend it. The effect of the *cipinimbe* is to bring together enough food for the chief's funeral feast. Here, as before, the chief's men may not cross the boundary for fear of reprisals, and the effect is to impose a levy in an informal way over most of the villages in the chief's area.

The Chief as a Symbol of Unity

643 The chief is a representative of his people and it is his particular duty to ensure their welfare and that of the chiefdom as
579 a whole. His symbolic representation of the unity of his people is brought out clearly by his right to fines in cases involving bloodshed and arson. Strife and division in a chiefdom in the old days were likely to end in spilt blood and burnt huts so that the Yao associate bloodshed and hut-burning with dissension within the chiefdom.

684 Most other offences are against the individual and not the
685 chiefdom as a whole: the case is brought to the chief so that compensation may be awarded. Adultery and theft thu are definitely civil offences. Nowadays, a fine is imposed, but this is seen to be a White innovation, and the money from it is looked upon as 'Boma' money.[1] In disputes where blood has
682 been shed, however, the chief is entitled to fine the guilty party on his own account. The chief is said to be 'blinded' by the
683 blood and a payment must be made to him before he may 'see'

[1] i.e. Government money.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

crop failures. Also I was told that important village headmen are buried with their heads pointing to the east.

The Yao concept of the past is reflected in the principles of political organization of these Machinga chiefdoms. The invasion is the datum point from which rank mainly stems. We may classify modern headmen into: those who were in the area before the Yao invasion, i.e. the Aborigines; the Invaders; and those who have come in since the invasion and have had to submit themselves to the Machinga chief, i.e. the Newcomers. The principle behind this classification of headmen is fundamental to Yao political structure. Stated most simply it is the rule that MacDonald quoted in describing the development of local organization: 'However large the settlement may become the man that is first in is the chief or headman.'[1] This is, of course, somewhat of a simplification, but the rule contains the essence of the principle. It was reversed for the Aboriginal Nyanja because the Yao subjugated them. But the claims of the Nyanja chiefs to rank because they had occupied the land first were recognized by the Yao who absorbed them into the social structure in positions of high rank.

But the principle holds among the Yao themselves, and for the Nguru in their movements after the White conquest. The operation of the principle is clearest in the structure of small local areas such as Chiwalo's. When Chiwalo's area was first settled, just after World War I, there were large tracts of unoccupied land. The first headmen to move into this region were Cigwaja, Kapaloma, Nyanje, Makata and Mumbwa. The local chief Chiwalo followed Cigwaja, but as Cigwaja was one of the Invader headmen under Chiwalo during the period of invasion, he now recognized Chiwalo as the chief. The area that is now Chiwalo's chiefdom was divided out among these five headmen. As other headmen came into the area they had to approach one of these five for land rights. These, when granted, were granted irrevocably in a block to the new village headman who then had sole rights to distribute the land afterwards. If he had the land to spare, he may have granted a portion of it to yet another village headman, and this action was also irrevocable. The land occupation pattern in any particular area is therefore extremely complex, because in addition to the village garden areas, indivi-

[1] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 147. See p. 35 above.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

Arabic greeting to their seniors. This is done by placing the left hand on the chest and bending slightly forward to the village headman, saying, '*Subaye*'. The senior should then respond, '*Alaye*'. Also, important headmen are usually buried in the centre of the village, not in the common graveyard. The tomb of an important headman or personage, usually built of stones, concrete or brick, is called *nsati*. The right to bury in the village must be obtained from the chief 'because the land is his', and in Kawinga's area a fee of 6*s*. must be paid to him.

The Struggle for Government Recognition

Thus far, I have been discussing the ways in which the rank of village headmen may be expressed. I now describe the way in which these marks of prestige are associated in the three categories of headmen we have distinguished, and in what way the competition between them is phrased. I have already described how all the chiefs in the areas to which I am referring are all successors of the original leaders of the invasions, and are usually the present Government representatives or Native Authorities.

The people must recognize the rank of chief because mystical beliefs prescribe activities in one direction, and because the limiting structure of the White Administration does so in another. A village headman cannot hold initiation ceremonies without the permission of the chief because of the mystical sanction, but the chief also has legal authority over his subject headmen. He as Native Authority is recognized by the Government and is its representative to his people. The Native Authority Ordinance (1933) specifically imposes penalties on those who do not recognize the authority of the chief. Under Section 12 of the Ordinance, the Native Authority may arrest without warrant any person who is accused of failing to obey his order or direction, interferes with his lawful duties, professes to be a chief or assumes the duties of a chief without Government approval. Under Section 13(*i*) severe penalties are imposed on any person who conspires against or in any way attempts to undermine the lawful power and authority of any chief or Native Authority. His position is therefore greatly strengthened against the village headmen and I have been told of one or two prosecutions by chiefs under this section. Nowadays, the mere threat of

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

or a girl who has just returned from *Chipuka* must not touch the child, as it is said, "Her body is hot and would give fever to the child." To guard against such a happening, some "clean" woman, after handing some beads to the mother, will ask to be allowed to take the infant. This indicates that should it sicken, the beads will pay the medicine-woman who comes to cure it. The mother and baby are simply washed in water and are not treated with medicine, unless meconium has been voided before the child was delivered.[1] If the infant dies before it is presented to the outside world, it is disposed of in the same way as a stillborn child, i.e. buried in the ash-heap. About the tenth day, the baby is adorned with a girdle of beads and two little pieces of stick obtained from a medicine-woman to make the infant grow fat.

The length of time during which the father and mother refrain from cohabitation after the birth of a baby varies greatly according to circumstances. Four months is probably a minimum, while two years, during which the woman suckles the child, is the common interval. After the first coitus, the man and woman wash themselves and the baby is bathed in the same water to prevent any ill coming to it.

Suckling often continues much longer than two years. If the mother dies, the child may be suckled by the grandmother, an aunt, or some other woman, but the breasts must first be treated with medicine or the child would die

A child born breech first is called *salanga*, a word which is also used to denote a variety of domestic fowl which always has the appearance of having its feathers ruffled. A child who dies before the father and mother have resumed sexual relations is buried in a graveyard apart from that of adults. The grave, dug with sticks, not hoes, is very shallow, and when it is filled in, a heap of stones is made above it. Only women attend the burial. A deep grave would cause the mother to go on losing children at an early age. The body of such a child is called *lituwa*, "hyaena."

A woman dying undelivered is placed in the grave in the usual way and then, before filling in the earth, one of the grave-diggers descends into the pit, cuts through the enveloping shroud, and incises the abdomen. One end of a long bamboo stick or reed is inserted in the incision and the other end is brought out to the surface of the grave. If this were not done, "many would die in childbirth."

Twins are not killed by the Yao but are well treated and always cared for equally. They are given similar clothing and food.[2] There is a story that the mother of Nkwamba,

[1] *Chinguru*, vide infra, p. 286.

[2] H. A. Werner, 'Among the Congo Cannibals, by John H. Weeks, London, 1913, a review,' (Man, vol. 14, no. 18, 1914, p. 18).

I take this opportunity of referring to Miss Werner's review in which, speaking of twins, she says, "They are always among the Anyanja given the names *Mapoli* and *Nyasa*." *Mapoli* in Chinyanja refers to a kind of musical instrument and the Chipeta meaning is "ornament palm." *Nyasa* is a Chipeta word which certainly means "the back." It is sometimes used of the second born twin but does not occur in Chinyanja. I have never heard of twins either among the Wayao or the Anyanja spoken of by these names. A mother carries the first born on the right arm and the second born on the left, but, so far as I know, she does not give a duplicate greeting nor make a habit of eating equally with both hands.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

769 supposed to be the abode of spirits. Except in the case of chiefs, the Wayao never make any erections over their graves, like the Anyanja grass shelters, and the present-day Mohammedan earth imitations of Swahili tombs.

766 Chiefs, and the more important headmen, are usually buried in their own villages. Over the grave, a grass hut with a veranda is erected; the hut is covered with calico, and guns were formerly set in as veranda posts. Guns and ivory used to be buried with the corpse [567] but these Yao, I am told, never practiced the barbarous custom of burying slaves with their chiefs. Information of the death of a chief was always conveyed to other chiefs by slaves who were kept by the recipient of the message.

Since the time of the old Malemya, the corpse of a chief always lies with its head in the direction of the old chief's grave. The grave is swept around, and the house pulled down as in the case of an ordinary man, but the grave-hut is rebuilt every year and never forgotten.

Since the burial of the dead is more or less correlated with the idea of planting seed from which progeny will spring, the natives will not bury a leper, believing that if they did so, leprosy would spring up all around them. Persons dying of an epidemic disease such as small-pox are dealt with in the same way. In these cases and in that of a man dying of ordeal poison, the body is enclosed in a mat and put up in a tree, a manner of disposing of the dead common among the Anguru and some Anyanja. Concerning death from dropsy, similar precautions are taken to those in the instance of a woman dying in childbirth,[1] and a tube is put down to the body from the surface of the ground.

A leper feeling that the end is near, will ask to be put in a hut built outside the limits of the burial ground. Here, provided with water and food for a few days, he will wait to die near the graveyard wherein he knows he cannot be buried.

[765a] Anyone who is wounded with a spear or any other weapon is not taken into the village, but is kept in a hut in the bush. If death results, the mourning ceremonies differ somewhat from the ordinary rites and are much curtailed.

881 **Initiation Ceremonies.** Under this heading I propose to deal with the three ceremonies, *Lupanda*, *Chiputu* and *Litiwo*. They are occasions of great importance in the life of the native and their educative effect for the good of the tribe is far reaching.

At *Lupanda* (*Ndapala*) the young boys attend; at *Chiputu* the young girls go through their initiation and a side ceremony for young married men takes place, while *Litiwo* celebrates the first quickening with child. All the ceremonies are included in the word *Unyago*. Macdonald in *Africana* while referring to "the mysteries"[2] gives scant information about the ceremonies and has, presumably, without much knowledge of what goes on, condemned these customs like many others as furthering "absurd superstitions." He has failed to recognise that they are occasions when a large amount of useful advice is imparted, good manners are insisted on, and tribal custom is made known. Sexual questions are dealt with in these mysteries, and, though mixed up with a large amount of superstition, a

[1] Vide supra, p. 238. [2] Op. cit., vol. 2, ch. 7.

3: Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

against all evils — witchcraft, attack by lions, etc. The *akuwasi* then set about building shelters in which the *unãi* will remain during their term of instruction. According to the number of the *unãi* so the number of places where shelters are built may vary from one, two or three, to as many as eight. Each of these places is called *Ndapulo*. They may be many miles apart and are so placed for the convenience of the mothers in various groups of villages who bring the food daily to the group of boys from those villages.

The boys when they originally left the village were wearing a large bark-cloth covering, with beads and calico, which latter articles have been taken by the *m'mikilo* and his assistants. At *Ndapulo* they wear simply a loin-cloth of bark.

During their stay at *Ndapulo*, the *unãi* are given animal names by the *akuwasi* who carry on the instruction of the boys until their return to *Lupanda*, the *m'mikilo* having gone back to his village immediately after the circumcision. The names given to the boys are commonly names of beasts of prey such as Alikulo (*likulo* = the jackal), Achimwesi (*chimwesi* = the leopard), etc.

Certain restrictions as to diet are laid upon the *unãi* by the *m'mikilo*, e.g. no meat of an animal killed by a beast of prey, no mudfish, *likumbulo*. He will not allow any villager to visit *Ndapulo* after seven P.M. and visitors may only be men who have been through the ceremony. An uncircumcised man is called *mbulolo*, one who has not been to his *Unyago*.

Other restrictions as to foodstuffs may be made by the *akuwasi*, generally in connection with the mythical origin of such food substances. A finger-shaped yam called *lipeta* is taboo, as it is said to have first sprung from the grave of a leper, the inference being obvious. After the *Unyago*, the boys have to undergo a special doctoring before they may partake of them. Bananas and rice are similarly refused them, the latter on account of a story to the effect that rice grew from the nostrils of a dead man, the idea doubtless having relation to the resemblance of rice grains to maggots. Fish is denied them by some masters of ceremonies, as it is said to have originated from the diaper of a woman which she threw away while bathing.

Each *m'mikilo* may have special observances of his own. One near Zomba caused all cassava to be roasted in a certain way. Rows of pieces of cassava were placed in split bamboo spits and so roasted before the fire in the manner of fish. If roasted in the ordinary way, the cassava would split and show the white floury material inside, signified by the verb *ku-lapala*. If this is eaten by the *unãi*, it is said that the preputial wound would reopen.

The length of time spent at *Ndapulo* varies from four weeks to as long as three or four months. In the first place they must wait till the circumcision wounds of all are completely healed. Delay may be occasioned by complications having arisen in some cases. Again, permission to return may be withheld by the chief for some reason or other. Should one of the *unãi* die at *Ndapulo*, the body is buried out in the bush and nothing is said to the parents until after the ceremonies are over and all have returned to the village.

village had its regular place of torture and *masui* drinking, two or three miles from the village. Those used by Makanya, the old Ennihe chief, may still be seen. 754

A clear way is made two feet broad and fourteen feet long in the bush and here the accused takes up his position attended on either side by the two pleaders, the defending pleader on the right, the prosecuting on the left. Facing east or west or following the directions originally given by the caster-of-lots, that is, taking up the position in which the accused is supposed to take a midnight bath, or practise some rite under a tree or an ant hill, etc., he is given a decoction of *masui* to drink from a gourd. This decoction is made on the spot, the bark being pounded up on a stone by one of the prosecutors. The accused must have had no food that day. He then starts to walk up and down the short cleared path with the two men, one on either side of him, the one saying, "Now you have drunk *masui*, you shall die as you deserve; you did in fo-and-fo," the other denying the accusations, saying, "He shall vomit the poison." He is watched by the assembled crowd who note the various symptoms of which vomiting is the first and said to be the most characteristic. After this has gone on for some time, they watch for what is called the *nguyo* which is said to be "a ball of bile formed in the mouth and expelled by vomiting so that it bursts on reaching the ground but not before", followed often by a second ball, twenty minutes later. Should this be expelled, recovery may be expected, foreshadowed by clearing of the vision. If he recovers, he is indeed a wonderful man and is hailed on all sides. The women trill with their tongues and shout, and he is carried back in triumph; the defending pleader will swagger about and demand anything he wants for his client. 695

A fatal termination is characterised by little and non-forcible vomiting. Purging is common but said to be painless. Vision is affected and as time goes on, the spectators ask what he can see, "Do you see that over there?" indicating a hill. If he makes mistakes, then they say, "Ah, he is going to die!"

The poison may not take full effect for three or four hours. The end is ushered in by a last stage when the legs become weak; he staggers, then unable to stand any longer, falls to the ground dead, executed by the onlookers who rush in and hurl stones upon the body, crushing it. The relatives take the mangled corpse and lay it on logs covered with grass in the bush. No other covering is permitted. It may be placed in a tree by people acting as *anele*. Burial is forbidden. [764]

In some cases *masui* used to be burned, not being given the chance of the poison trial. This took place at a recognised spot like *ndanse*. The last man to be burned by Makanya was Mtuhula in 1892. Burning was also a punishment in some bad cases of murder. Such was the fate of Chingale. The man was put in a slave-stick, a pile of logs was built round him and then set on fire. [683]

Witch-finder. In addition to ordeal poison, another method of discovering a *masui* is by "smelling out." If a number of people have died in a certain village, the inhabitants may begin to think that there is a *masui* among them, and procure the services of a *mkondio*. 754 695 791

ndembo, a woman who is pregnant for the first time;[1] *kwembere*, a woman who has one or two children; *ajembere*, a woman who has three or four children, and lastly, *ndabwa*, a woman who is past child-bearing age.

The information which I have been able to collect on abortifacients and contraceptives suggests that they are not used by married people merely to prevent their having more children, but that they are used by people who wish to avoid pregnancies which would be embarrassing, for example, by a woman whose husband is a labour migrant. To what extent the abortifacients and contraceptives are efficacious I cannot say; some, I know for certain, rely on a magical principle, for example, the medicated cord worn by a man during intercourse. On the other hand, the abortifacients taken orally may have some active ingredient.

A barren woman or an impotent man is regarded with some embarrassment and the marriage ceremies (*ariamungwe*) of a childless couple will go to considerable trouble and expense consulting diviners and leeches in an attempt to make their wards productive. Childless couples are regarded as not fully adult and are treated in a patronising way by those who have borne children. Since a man may marry other wives, barrenness in a woman is a cause of sorrow to her husband, but is not in itself a ground for divorce. Where the man is impotent, however, the woman may divorce him on this ground, though she usually takes a paramour and forces her husband to an action for damages which automatically leads to a divorce because it is the usual practice in these cases for the court to ask the woman if she wants to be divorced from her husband.

In contrast to the satisfaction shown at the birth of a child is the sense of evinced when a child is still-born or the woman miscarries. The Yao do not distinguish between still-births and abortions, both events being known by the word *kwasunga*. This is a verb and refers to the process of abortion; there is no term for the dead foetus itself. I made no attempt to enumerate miscarriages and still-births because they are supposed to be due to breaches of sexual taboos on the part of the husband and wife, and interviewees were naturally reluctant to mention them. Miscarriages and still-births are greatly feared, and the woman is considered to be in a very dangerous condition until she and her husband have carried out a ritual purification. Should a man have intercourse with a woman who has miscarried and not yet been purified he will contract a disease called *kwaw* which is believed to be invariably fatal. Still-born children or aborted foetuses are buried in a hole dug with sharpened sticks in the bush by the women, whereas children who are born alive and die afterwards are buried in the graveyard in graves dug by men with hoes. The burial spots of still-born babies or aborted foetuses are marked with a stone or broken pottery, since it is believed that to step on them will induce an illness.

The concern of the interested kin-groups is shown in the child-birth procedure. Birth normally takes place in a hut in the presence of the elder female relatives of the woman and the female representatives of the man. The husband's representatives are necessary because the Yao, like many other Central African peoples, believe that an adulterine child will not be born to the woman unless she confesses (*kupwa*) the name of the genitor. If she persists in concealing the identity of the genitor, they

[1] *ndembo* = elephant, hence ivory. The names *ndembo* and *ndembo* have both refer to the ivory bands traditionally worn by the women in the pregnancy initiation ceremony.